DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 967 EC 133 538

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TITLE Balancing Team Integrity with Administrative Control in the Development and Management of Special Education Programs.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of The Council for Exceptional Children (59th, New York, NY, April, 1981, Session F-63).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; Compliance (Legal); *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Program Administration; *Program Development; *Program Implementation; Special Education; Teamwork
IDENTIFIERS *Education for All Handicapped Children Act; *Massachusetts (Quincy)

ABSTRACT

The paper reviews the experiences of special education administrators in Quincy (MA) Public Schools regarding compliance with P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Noted are the decentralized model of Pupil Personnel Service Teams, the administrator's role in guiding teachers to set priorities in academic and vocational skills for the students, the development of alternative program models (such as preschool programs and resource room programs), the development of systemwide procedures, and flexibility of programing (as demonstrated in rapid program expansion for students with severe emotional and behavior problems). (CL)

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BALANCING TEAM INTEGRITY WITH ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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by

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Prepared for presentation at the 59th Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children in New York (April 12-17, 1981).

Although the United States has always placed great value on the availability and quality of public education, in 1975 more than four million handicapped children were receiving either no education or were placed in programs that did not adequately meet their educational needs (Bersoff and Veltman, 1979). The growing national awareness of these educational inequities coupled with increased emphasis upon an individual's constitutional rights prompted a series of class action suits initiated by parents of retarded children. The resultant judicial decisions clearly established the handicapped child's right to an education (Dapper, 1974; Gallagher, 1974; Greer, 1975; Turnbull, 1975). To ensure that all handicapped children would be provided a "free appropriate public education", Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the historic and landmark "Education for All Handicapped Children Act", which became effective on October 1, 1977.

The implementation of this complex and comprehensive law has had a dramatic and all-encompassing impact upon the total operation and administration of the public schools. Those charged with the responsibilities of administering special education programs have struggled to translate the specific and uncompromising regulations into meaningful programs for children (Daily, 1974; Humes, 1978; Orelove, 1978; Sproles, Panther, and Lanier, 1978). That task--which is ongoing--has not been an easy one.

In reviewing the professional literature and research, one finds a multiplicity of articles relating to the implementation of P.L. 94-142. Most of those articles deal with developing special education programs for children with specific handicaps or with the new responsibilities assigned to school systems (Drucker, 1976; Journal of Research and Development, 1979 and 1980; Hobbs, Bartel, Dokecki, Gallagher, and Reynolds, 1979).

Few articles address the very real problems of the local school system in attempting to meet the widely divergent needs of all special education students within a meaningful organizational framework (Harris, 1975; Vergason, Smith, and Wyatt, 1975; Lilly, 1971). Fewer articles still offer specific directions and practical examples to special education administrators in their efforts to fulfill the letter and the spirit of the law in a sound organizational manner (Griffin, Del-Val, and Anderson, 1981; Maher, 1980).

Therefore, this paper will review the practical experiences of special education administrators in the Quincy Public Schools, a median-sized suburban school system with an enrollment of 12,000 students in twenty-six schools. Approximately 12% of these students are receiving special education services. The school system has successfully maintained its long and proud tradition of excellence in special education (Karas, 1978) while confronting the realities of these exacting mandates: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Chapter 766 (the comprehensive special education law in Massachusetts which became effective in 1974), and Public Law 94-142. Despite the often-times overwhelming administrative burdens the laws impose, the ongoing process of developing appropriate programs to meet individual student needs has not been lost. Because of the magnitude and complexities of the new mandates, the process has necessarily become a more systematic and creative one with the goal of maintaining a proper balance between team integrity and administrative control.

Certainly one of the most important responsibilities of all special education administrators is the setting in motion of a process that enables program development to occur in response to the needs of students determined to be in need of special education. It is only when such a process is in place that the spirit of the new mandates is fulfilled. Based upon our experiences within the Quincy Public Schools, we feel that such a process can be achieved by addressing the following issues: (1) Awareness of individual needs of students; (2) Development of alternative program models; (3) Establishment of system-wide procedures; and (4) Flexibility in programming.

AWARENESS OF THE INDIVIDUAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

Since the implementation of Chapter 766 in 1974, the Quincy Public Schools has adopted a decentralized (or building based) model of evaluating and delivering services to students in need of special education. A decentralized model of Pupil Personnel Services Teams existed in all Quincy schools for several years prior to the implementation of Chapter 766. The Pupil Personnel Services Team, which included the classroom teacher, principal, guidance counselor, psychologist, special education teacher and speech, hearing and language therapist subsequently became the Chapter 766 TEAM.

The decentralized model has been successful because it forces each school to accept responsibility for evaluating and providing services for every special education student within the school and, as a result, to be acutely aware of each student's special needs. The inherent danger of the decentralized model is that it is possible for the special education administrators who ultimately make the program decisions for the system to lose touch with the needs of special education students and the individual special education program in each school. If system-wide programs based on actual student need

are to be developed, it is imperative for administrators to be aware of, and in constant touch with, the needs of students receiving special education services as well as the day-to-day programs that teachers are implementing. This has been accomplished in Quincy in a number of ways.

A. A copy of each Individual Education Plan (IEP) written is forwarded to the Special Education Office where it is reviewed by the administrator. The student's needs as outlined in the student profile section and performance level section of the IEP are compared with the services being provided to the student to make certain that the level of services are appropriate to the needs of the students.

B. Observations of all programs and most particularly the substantially separate class programs are made frequently by the special education administrator. The purpose of each visit is not only the familiar check to see if the classroom is being run well, but also the careful look at the students in the classroom and their individual needs--reading levels, behavior characteristics, motor skills, language abilities, etc. The information that the administrator gains from these visits enables him/her to make timely program decisions.

C. Special education administrators in Quincy have guided teachers in the setting or priorities of instruction for students. One specific example is the setting of priorities of academic and vocational skills for the mentally retarded population. In Quincy there are eight teachers who work with the retarded in substantially separate class situations. If each teacher were allowed to determine his/her own percentages of time to be spent on academic and vocationally-related skills, the consistency of the total program which is so vital for these students would be lost. The administrator must weigh the

research data in this area, make programmatic decisions and instruct each teacher in the use of the data. The programmatic decision in Quincy is to infuse career education with academic education at the elementary level and to delay vocational training until age sixteen, since students can remain in school until age twenty-two.

DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM MODELS

The reviewing of the individual needs of students will be of no use to either administrators or students if there are no program options to meet those needs. Within the Quincy Public Schools, many programs have been developed or expanded to meet the requirements of the law and to service students with special educational needs.

In looking back over the past seven years since the implementation of Chapter 766, it is clear that our continuous assessment of student needs has resulted in the development of many new programs as well as many shifts and/or changes in existing programs. The following services and programs have been developed or expanded to fulfill the requirements of the law and to meet the unique needs of our special education population.

A. Pre-School Special Needs Program - Four classes (7 sessions) service substantially handicapped pre-schoolers with severe language, cognitive, motor, and social/emotional problems.

B. Monitoring and Resource Room Programs - In each building the special education teacher provides direct services to students and adapts classroom materials, media and methodologies to meet the needs of prototype 502.1, 502.2 and 502.3 students. The key is the special education teacher's ability to meet the student's need whether it be a learning disability, visual/motor problem, reading deficit, etc.

C. Substantially Separate Classes - An alternative to both regular class placement and to costly private school placement must be available for the mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and language impaired or learning disabled. Classroom programs for all of these students have been initiated or expanded.

D. Special Services - Itinerant specialists such as psychologists, teacher of the visually handicapped, occupational therapist, physical therapist, adaptive physical educator, and speech, hearing and language therapists are servicing special education students in all schools.

E. Vocational Programs - Viable program alternatives must be available to allow special education students to develop vocational skills. Quincy has two junior high pre-vocational programs and three full day high school vocational programs available to special education students. The junior high programs allow students to explore various vocational alternatives and assess their own vocational skills and interests. The high school programs are designed for students who would not be successful in a regular vocational school program, but who need vocational training.

DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEM-WDIE PROCEDURES

It is obvious that school systems such as Quincy's which utilize a decentralized model for the TEAM process must have well developed, system-wide procedures which provide a framework within which the individual TEAMS can operate. The Quincy Public Schools has had such procedures in effect since first developed by an interdisciplinary team in the summer of 1974 and revised in January of 1977 and September 1978.

In addition, it has become necessary to develop procedures for determining placement of students in programs outside the student's home school. In the past building TEAMS recommended substantially separate classroom placements for students when they had not exhausted all means at their disposal in the least restrictive setting (i.e. within their own building). In other cases, the building TEAMS recommended substantially separate class placements that were inappropriate for the students because the TEAMS were not aware of the needs of the other students in that separate class.

As a result, the Quincy Public Schools has designed one procedure for all referrals to substantially separate classes and private day or residential school programs. When a TEAM has concerns that a student is not making satisfactory progress in the building program, the student's records and written referral are forwarded to the special education office. The special education administrator reviews the file and either:

A. Returns the file to the building TEAM with specific suggestions for further testing or building modifications; or

B. Sends the file to the appropriate substantially separate class teacher who reviews the file and visits the student in his current program; or

C. Makes a referral to a private day or residential school if no Quincy program is appropriate.

If the student appears to be appropriate for a substantially separate or private day school program, the building TEAM reconvenes to write the IEP. It is the responsibility of the sending school to write the IEP with input from the receiving teacher.

This process ensures that the students who are placed in substantially separate class programs have needs that are compatible and, therefore, will be able to have those needs met in that setting. For example, it is very difficult to place a student with emotional and behavioral problems into a class for language impaired students. Such a placement would create a situation in which all students would not be able to have individual needs met. In addition, this process continually allows the special education administration to be intimately aware of the individual needs of students in special education classes and aware of the types of programs required to meet their needs.

FLEXIBILITY OF PROGRAMMING

The final and most difficult step to achieve is that of maintaining a flexible attitude toward programming for special education students. In many school systems, a program or class may be developed because there appears to be a number of students with a similar need. A problem arises a few years later when either:

A. There are only a few students with similar needs and those with different needs must be added to the class; or

B. Administrators find one class with only three children and another with twelve because the needs of children have changed and no one has monitored the change.

School systems are very responsive to new trends in special education and readily develop new programs. Seldom, however, do we see the school system that closes or reorganizes a program.

The Quincy Public Schools has been looking at programs in a flexible way for a number of years. Over a three year period two Classes for Developmental Disabilities were disbanded as our numbers of "trainable retarded" youngsters grew smaller. The remaining few students were able to

be integrated into programs with higher functioning students and, in fact, developed higher level skills. In place of this program, a class for intermediate students with learning disabilities was initiated.

Another example is the increasing number of students at the primary, intermediate, and junior high levels with severe emotional and behavioral problems. During the 1976-1977 school year, there were two classes for such students; today there are five classes. The growth has been so great that the fourth new class, started in September 1980, could not manage all students so that two months later it became necessary to begin a fifth new classroom. The staff and materials to initiate such a program had to come from within the special education department due to increasing fiscal constraints.

This program expansion required that the special education administrator be both flexible and realistic in looking at other special education programs which could be cut in order to start this new program. It was determined that the substantially separate program for 16 to 21 year old students with substantial handicaps would reorganize its vocational areas and thereby require four, instead of five, staff members. A call to all special education teachers using primary level materials resulted in a good stock of materials with which the new classroom could start. The original need for program expansion was noted in November. By January the decision to transfer a teacher had been made; one program had been reorganized; a new program had been initiated; and all had been done in an orderly fashion taking into account the needs of all special education students. All parents were informed of any changes made, and there was not one complaint despite the fact that the changes were made within a relatively short period of time.

SUMMARY

The development and management of special education programs which both implement special education legislation and provide appropriate services to children with special educational needs is the challenge confronting all special education administrators. All too often, special education administration occurs solely on a case by case basis or, conversely, within a static, inflexible framework of predetermined procedures and services.

To avoid either extreme, the special education administrator must maintain an effective balance between TEAM integrity and administrative control. This requires the administrator to balance system-wide organization with creativity and flexibility of programming. Maintaining that balance becomes more difficult in a large school system where the tendency is greater for the individual student to get lost amidst paperwork and statistics.

The Quincy Public Schools has recognized that system-wide organization is crucial to a framework in which building-based TEAMS can recommend services and programs which meet the needs of children. Yet the presence of a system-wide framework has not dictated the programs into which individual students would be placed. The flexibility of programming and the utilization of creative thinking in the development and management of special education programs has ensured that the framework is useful only so long as it serves the needs of special education students in Quincy.

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